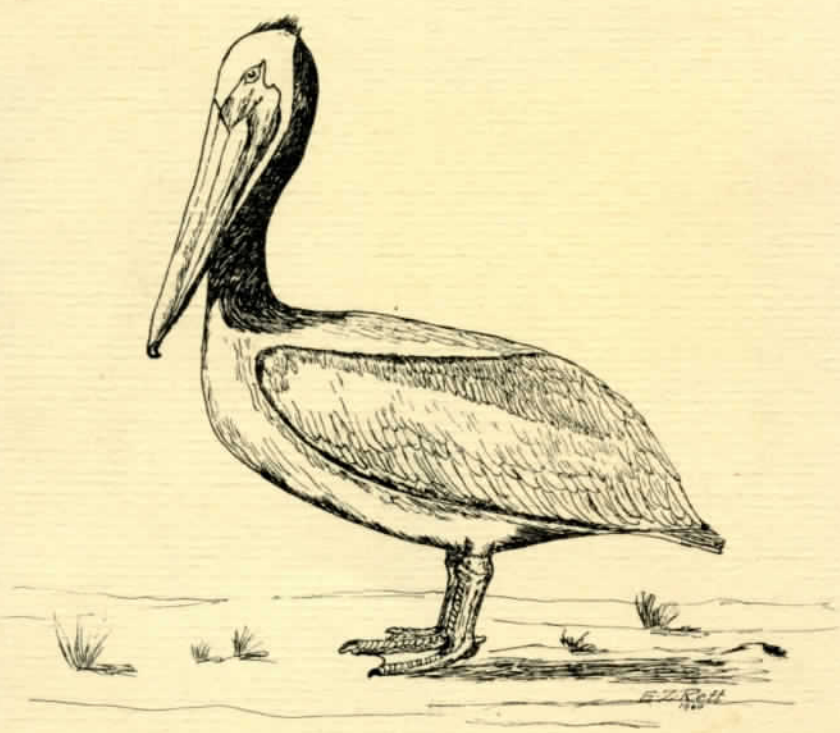


# NOTICIAS

Santa Barbara Historical Society



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Pleasanton, and the same for Mrs. Clinton Hale in Santa Barbara—this last mentioned screen is now at Mrs. Lawrence More's home in Montecito. A screen made for Mrs. Frederick Gould now is in the beautiful dining-room at the Lennart Palme's residence. Other screens were made, one for the Harrison Gray Otis family, of Los Angeles, and several for the Edwin Gledhills, in payment for their lovely photographs of her family. She made, also, screens for her three sons, Perry, Winthrop, and Jack—the last is now in the home of Mrs. Walter Briggs.

The chests for children were charmingly designed with nursery rhymes, and the bookends with family coat of arms.

Mr. Reginald Johnson, the architect of the Montecito Biltmore Hotel, had Mrs. Austin design the coat of arms of Castile for him. This colorful work, after all these years, still distinguishes the library of the Hotel.

Three beautiful "Books of Memory," with the seal of the Diocese of Los Angeles on them, were placed in St. Paul's Cathedral, in Los Angeles, in St. Luke's Church, in Long Beach, and for the "Good Samaritan Hospital" Memorial Bed.

Although her husband had gone back and forth to Europe many times, it was not until late in life that Belle More at last went to Italy and saw for herself that she had discovered the secret of the Renaissance artists. Her tubes of oil paint, her brushes, and her tools, she had imported from France; but it was her talent and inspiration, worked out in her improvised studio in Santa Barbara, that had brought her distinguished work to completion.

CAMILLA WATERMAN AUSTIN

## El Vaquero Viejo

By CLIFFORD McELRATH

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I first saw Joe Espinosa or Old Joe or El Viejo as he was variously called when I was cattle boss and bronc rider for the Santa Cruz Island Co. shortly after World War I. Joe had worked for the Island Co. for many years but before I came to the island he had had a run-in with the superintendent and had been let go.

Jose was an old Spanish vaquero past 80 years old; he did not know his exact age, but he had been born a subject of Mexico in Santa Barbara and had seen Fremont raise the first American flag in that town, had roped Grizzly bears for the bull and bear fights, knew Joaquin Murrietta, Three Finger Jack and Vasquez, and had driven cattle from Los Angeles to San Francisco many times.

Jose was camped at Campo Chino about two or three miles from Prisoners Harbor fishing crawfish for a living. In getting into his skiff he dragged his 30-30 in by the muzzle. The bullet took the first joint off of two of his fingers, glanced around a rib and lodged under the skin on his back.

He wrapped the stumps of his fingers in a bandana handkerchief and rowed all the way to Prisoners Harbor. His reason was that he couldn't reach the bullet to cut it out and wanted someone to do it for him. He was quite disgusted and considered us all a bunch of sissies when we refused to



do it for him and the superintendent put him on the boat and sent him to Santa Barbara for medical aid.

He never told me why he was getting into his skiff with a 30-30. Maybe we had one more calf at branding time. I never worried too much about it. It was costumbre.

The next time I met him was when I had become superintendent and we were dehorning a large number of cows at the Scorpion ranch at the east end of the island. Dehorning cattle in those days was a rough, brutal job. We roped them and stretched them out and sawed the horns off.

Jose had returned to the island and was camped at Potato Harbor. After finishing work the first day we were eating supper when Jose showed up. He said he had come to visit with some of his old friends and his brother Quate. The old coyote didn't fool me any. I knew he had come to hit me up for his old job.

We were short handed and I liked the old boy's looks, he was a fine specimen for an old man, and I put him on for a few days as I told him. Those few days stretched into several years or as long as I was on the island.

Jose was about medium size, slender and wiry, was fast and definite in all his movements. He had good aquiline features showing his Spanish blood but his Indian blood showed in his black eyes and many of his personal characteristics. He had probably been very good looking as a young man.

When we went to work the next day Jose proved to be all that was said of him. He was an artist with a riata, a fine rider and knew cattle. Many of our horses were cold backed or reparoso as we called them, meaning that when you got on them in the morning you were due for from one to a dozen stiff-legged bucks. In spite of his age this never bothered Jose. He would ride any horse that came along. I never gave him any bad horses but sometimes out on the range some rider would have a horse that he was afraid of and then I would see Joe coming in riding the bronc and the other rider on the gentle horse. Joe's answer would be "El bruto iba a matar el pobrecito." (The brute was going to kill the poor fellow.)

As time went on I took to taking Joe with me when I had a long trip to make. I would get him to telling me stories of the early days, which he loved to do. Make no mistake, Jose could spin a windy as well as the next one, but I grew to know him and could generally tell the difference. He also had a keen sense of historical values. He told me many times that I should put what he told me on paper "because when I am dead there will be none who remember these things."

One interesting fact that he told me was about the big arroyo that comes down through west Santa Barbara. Prior to El Gran Creciente, a big storm some time in the 1870's, this was nothing but a cattle trail formed by the cattle coming down to the cienega near the beach for water. During the year of the Gran Creciente there was a cloud burst in Salsipuedes canyon and the rush of water cut the arroyo to near its present depth and size in a single night.

As to Joaquin Murrietta, Jose scoffed at the idea that he was ever killed, as have some other old Californios that I have talked to. He said, "Muchacho, I knew him as well as I know you. He spent many nights at my father's home and I have sat and listened to his stories by the hour. He was a fine looking

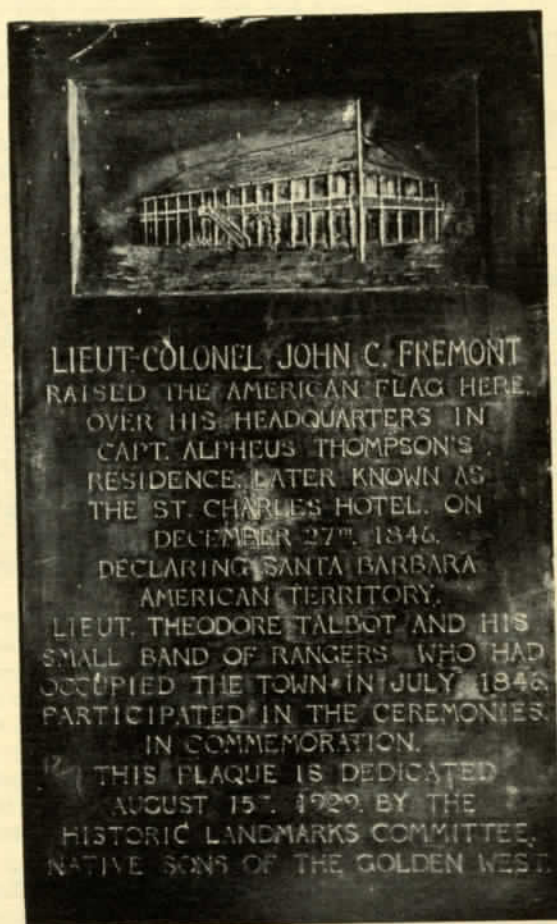


Photo by Karl Obert

man with fine features. I saw the head that they exhibited through the state and it was the typical flat faced head of a cholo. The head that exhibited with it was Three Fingered Jack who I also knew well, but the other was not Murrietta's."

As to Fremont and the first American flag raised in Santa Barbara he pointed out a spot in the middle of De la Guerra Street. There is a small adobe just east of the De la Guerra building. He measured out 18 paces from the southwest corner of this building and said, "This is where the first flag was raised. A man named Talo Pitin ran a cantina in the adobe where many were drinking that day. They attempted to run the flag up and the halyards stuck. Someone offered \$10.00 to anyone who would climb the pole and free the halyards. A little Indian boy that I used to play with who could climb like a monkey went shinnying up the pole. Just as he got to the top



the pole broke and he fell and was killed before my eyes, so it impressed it on my mind forever.

"The men freed the halyards, set the pole up again and raised the flag. It flew here for three days and then they moved it to the place where they now have a plaque."

He then turned to me and said, "Muchacho, you should go tell the people who keep the historia de pueblo so that this can be a matter of record." I asked him if he had ever tried to straighten out a historian and he said no. I replied, "Neither did I and I am not going to start now. We both know it was raised so let's let it go at that."

As to Grizzly bear he told me many interesting stories which I will omit so as not to bore my readers. Two, however, are worth touching on very briefly. A short while before he died I took him for a ride in my car. We drove out between Santa Barbara and Montecito. There were at that time several acres of vacant land at the mouth of a gully where the gully spread out into a flat. There was a large clump of poison oak and yerba oso or bear brush growing in the flat.

"Here," he said, "is where I roped my first grizzly when I was about 14 years old. A group of us were riding together when some dogs we had with us started up a bear in that clump. We surrounded the clump and the bear charged out right at me. My father shouted 'Laselo' meaning rope him. I was afraid of that bear but I was more afraid to disobey my father so I roped him. Others then got their riatas on him and we choked him to death."

At the time I visited Jose he had been laid up for some months. His horse had fallen with him running down a hill on the island and he had been hurt so that he could not work. He was shipped over to Santa Barbara where he finally got back into shape. He had then instead of taking a bus or other modern conveyance gotten hold of a horse and crossed the mountains and traveled all through the Cuyama, the San Marcos and I guess a lot of other back country until he landed a job riding for some ranch. When I saw him he was cleaning up his equipment preparatory to going to work.

Jose told me that while he was in the back country he had seen two grizzly bears. I asked him if he was sure they were grizzlies and not black bears. He replied somewhat indignantly, "Do you think anyone who has caught as many grizzlies as I have would make that mistake?" I dropped the matter thinking that perhaps the old man's memory was wandering into the long ago.

About ten years ago I read an article in the Readers Digest which said that there was a strong possibility that grizzlies still existed in some of the remote spots back of Santa Barbara such as Sespe Canyon and in parts of Modoc County. Be that as it may I hope that they were grizzlies that he saw and that the so-called sportsmen have not yet succeeded in killing the last of the species.

Jose was a grand old man and my friend. He could not read the printed page but he could read a track in the dust as well as any Indian and taught me much about the art of tracking. He was an hombre del campo to the last. His stories lose much in being translated into everyday English. The old California Poche, that mixture of early Spanish and Indian in which he told them, seemed to add flavor and romance to them.

Descansa en paz, amigo mio.